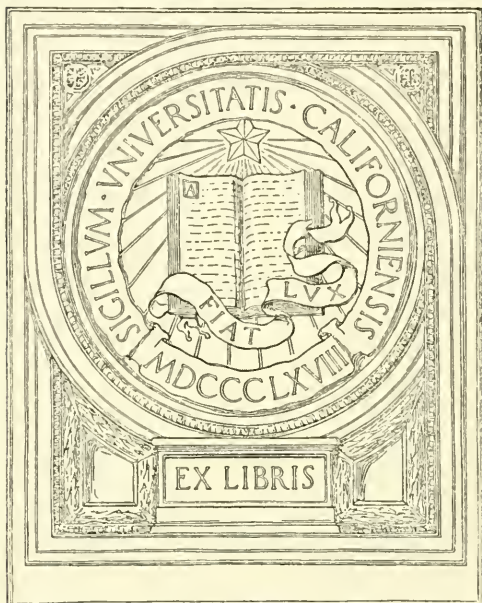


VERSES
by the WAY. J. D.
HOSKEN.



F. D. BEDFORD.

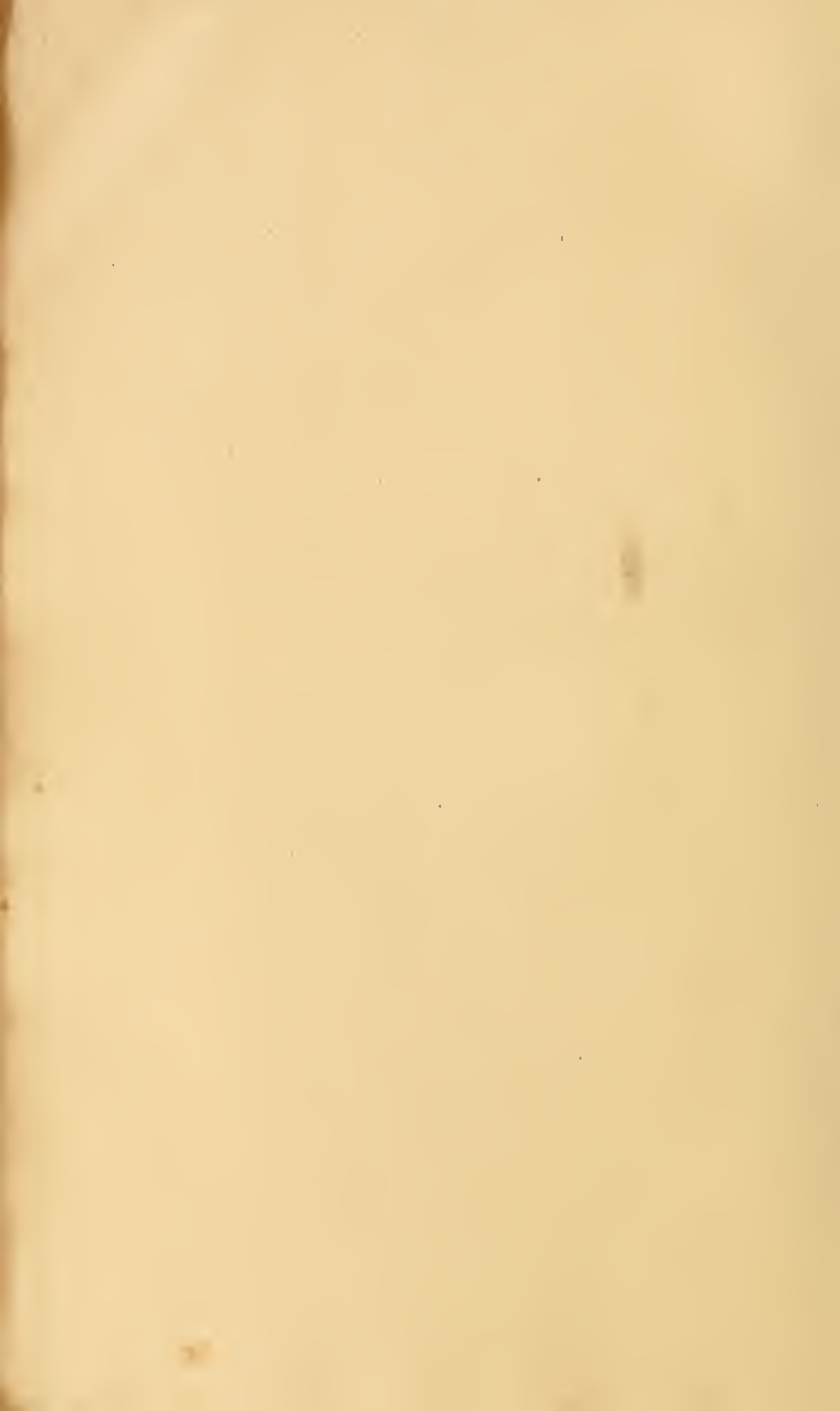
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
AT LOS ANGELES



THE GIFT OF
MAY TREAT MORRISON
IN MEMORY OF
ALEXANDER F MORRISON



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No. *66* *Muthu*

VERSES BY THE WAY

WITH A CRITICAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL

INTRODUCTION BY

‘Q’

[illegible]

VERSES
by the WAY. J. D.
HOSKEN.

METHVEN & CO. 18, BURY ST. LONDON, W.C.

P. D. BEDFORD.

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INTRODUCTION

JAMES DRYDEN HOSKEN was born at Helston, a small market town in the south-west of Cornwall, on June 14th, 1861. His father, Henry Hosken, was an iron-founder and a man of unusual attainments outside his trade, possessing (it is reported) a considerable stock of Greek and Latin, and much dexterity with the Mathematics: during the last years of his life, too, he made fair progress in the study of Hebrew. His death, in 1870, left his son to face a somewhat dismal childhood. The boy was but nine years old, and weak-chested: and the straitened economies of home could afford him no better education than that provided by the Helston National School.

The town of Helston has some natural advantages, and lies within easy reach, not only of the fine coast scenery of the Lizard district, but also of the beautiful

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and little-known Helford river; but it may be fairly called somnolent on any day of the year except the 8th of May, when its citizens wake up to celebrate the Flora or Furry-day,—a pagan festival of dateless antiquity and forgotten origin. The genuine ritual of this revel, stripped of such modern accretions as a Dog-show and Bazaar, is accurately described in Miss M. A. Courtney's *Cornish Feasts and Folk-Lore*. The revel begins at daybreak, when the men and maid-servants with their friends go into the country to breakfast. These are the 'Hal-an-tow.' They troop back about eight, laden with green boughs, preceded by a drum and singing the Hal-an-tow song, with the refrain—

‘ With Hal-an-tow ! Rumbelow !
For we are up as soon as any day O !
And for to fetch the summer home,
The summer and the May O !
For summer is a-come O !
And winter is a-go ! ’

These singers are privileged to levy contributions on strangers coming into the town. Meanwhile peals have been rung on the church-bells, and at nine the grammar-school boys demand their prescriptive holiday. At noon the Flora-dance is started from the

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market-house, the Mayor himself leading off, and the respectable townsfolk, male and female, gyrate through the streets ; in at the front-doors of the houses that have been left open for them, ringing every bell, knocking at every knocker, and out at the back ; sometimes making the circuit of a garden or descending into a cellar. Two beadles, their wands wreathed with flowers, and a band with a gaily-decorated drum, head the procession, which ends with ' hands across ' at the Angel Hotel, where there is always a ball in the evening.

But these and other blameless excesses are for the 8th of May only. On ordinary market-days you will find little to wonder at in Helston except the number of omnibuses that line its steep main street. Certainly the place seems but to have inspired young James Dryden Hosken with an early and vehement desire to leave it, and try his fortune in a wider field ; and in the midsummer of 1880—after a brief apprenticeship to saddlery, which weakened his already delicate health—he fared up to London, with a little money in his pocket, and began to look about for work. At this time, though a voracious reader of all books that came

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in his way, he had written little or nothing, and had scarcely turned his thoughts towards verse. His genius, as I shall hope to show, is meditative rather than perceptive; and to a genius of this order precocity is peculiarly dangerous. The direct perceptions of a very young man may be vivid, original, valuable: his meditations upon the universal scheme and man's place in it, if not second-hand, will pretty certainly be crude. We may therefore hold it fortunate that Mr. Hosken's poetic activity and his acquaintance with real life developed together. In the summer of 1880 his energies were wholly devoted to hunting for work in London,—to the elementary pursuit of an honest meal.

As his resources dwindled, he drifted further and further east from his first lodgings near the Pentonville Road, and might have been carried straight on for the despair he was fast approaching, had not an accident set him on his feet. An old gentleman, whom he was fortunate enough to rescue from under the wheels of a passing tram, procured him an introduction which led to the offer of a post as Extra Outdoor Officer in H. M. Customs. He was stationed at

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the Royal Albert Docks. As every one knows, half the wild adventures and floating wickedness of this planet find their way, at one time or another, through the Royal Albert Docks; and life in their neighbourhood has a colour of its own, which is not the drab of conventional respectability. The life which Mr. Hosken made acquaintance with during the next two years was lawless, lewd, tumultuous, and abominably vicious; but with a certain large freedom of its own, unknown in the village or small town where the poor man lives in the shadow of his rich superior. At any rate, Mr. Hosken can look back on these two years and be glad of them, as indeed he has a right to be, for (odd as it sounds) they laid the foundations on which he has built a singularly pure and spiritual philosophy of life.

His health, which had been improving, broke down, however, as soon as he was removed from the water-side and stationed in the City; and he was forced to throw up the Customs and cast himself on the stream again. At one time he picked up a bare living as a theatrical 'super'; at another he acted as Librarian and Secretary to a small religious establishment in Cornwall; but finally, in 1885, declined the struggle

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in which his physical strength was continually betraying him, and returned to Helston, where in time employment was found for him as an auxiliary postman. In 1889 he was transferred to the General Post Office, London, as one of the indoor staff, but the confinement of the place again compelled him to abandon London and return to the country, where he took up his old position in the Helston Office.

This occupation he has now followed for seven years and more, and as a set-off against the tenuity of his stipend it can only be pleaded that the necessary exercise in the open air has made a man of him once more. He is now married and has two children : is of middling stature, slight, but well made, and of a warm complexion that masks his constitutional weakness. The upper part of the head curiously recalls the accepted portraits of Shakespeare, the brow being high and broadly domed, but in Mr. Hosken's case slightly overbalancing the jaws and mouth ; the hair fine, brown, and curling ; the eyes, as Aubrey would say, ' full and popping,' the iris grey and the expression at once dreamy and bright. In fact, so far as the face may go, no poet ever carried a better testimonial,

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were it not in danger of being belied by the native simplicity and modesty of Mr. Hosken's manner.

Indeed if modesty could have prevented it, his poems had never seen daylight. He had begun to write in London, and at home his poems grew until they filled a fair-sized chest: but the lid was kept down, and the secret only leaked out by the merest chance. It came to the ears of Mr. R. G. Rows, a County Councillor and an orator of renown throughout Cornwall, that the young postman had written some satirical verses that were worth a look, on local affairs in Helston. By dint of questioning he obtained, not indeed the satire, but a confession that there lay at home a pile of serious work, lyric, epic, and dramatic, which (the author hoped) was better worth seeing. These being shown, Mr. Rows at once detected their worth, considerable in any case, and fairly astonishing to one who knew the circumstances under which they were produced: and from that time has proved himself an untiring friend of the poet. Through his encouragement a small volume, in an orange-coloured paper wrapper, was produced for private circulation by a printer in Penzance. It contained a poetic drama *Phaon*

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and *Sappho*, and a number of lyrics, some of which are reprinted in the present volume. The pecuniary success of this adventure was not startling: but copies of the book found their way to London, and there evoked a small chorus of praise from critics who could be trusted to know poetry when they saw it. Some fugitive lyrics began to appear in *Longman's Magazine*, at the recommendation of Mr. Andrew Lang: and soon there came an offer from Messrs. Macmillan to republish *Phaon and Sappho* for a larger public. The volume (which included *Nimrod*, another poetical drama) appeared last year. Five-act poetical dramas at this time of day are not the easiest path to fame, and the author had chosen models which, if first-rate in theory, are in fact something too antique for modern taste: but here was a man with the genuine vein of gold in him, and the critics detected this and proclaimed it. To Mr. Hosken's great credit he did not lose his head amid the fumes of incense burnt by the reviews, as well as by ladies and gentlemen anxious to be early in their appreciation of that strange animal, a 'Postman-poet,' but (so to speak)—

'Went on cutting bread and butter.'

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A few months ago Mr. Gladstone, one of his warm admirers, sanctioned a grant of £100 to Mr. Hosken, and it is hoped that as his fame grows he may find means of livelihood more consistent with his merits and abilities than his present employment. But up to the present, Helston continues to receive its letters at the hands of one whose poetical gifts are as indubitable as the high character and fine courage with which he has fought the battle of life against heavy odds.

The popular fancy conceives a 'Postman-poet' as a melodious being, skipping between green hedgerows with Her Majesty's mail, and pausing ever and again to note a drooping curve of woodbine, or catch, and perhaps reproduce, the blackbird's silvery impromptu. There once lived at Bideford, in Devon, one Edward Capern, who answered in many respects to this description: but he drove a pony-cart. And when applied to James Dryden Hosken the conception is almost ludicrously inept. His daily round does not lie between green hedgerows, and his eye for the common objects of an English landscape is not that of

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a Tennyson nor yet of a Jefferies. To be sure, he can paint a picture if occasion arises, as here, for instance—

‘Love breathes upon my memory, and I see
The scene within my mind lost in time past,
The ceaseless sun descending in the sea,
The huge dark waves against the boulders cast,
The solitude of nature, if such be,
The momentary lull, broke by the roar
Of billows, or the sea-birds’ noisy glee
Around the time-sapped crags and gullies hoar.’

But he brings to natural scenery neither the ecstatic worship of Shelley, nor the reverent and curious awe of Wordsworth, nor the open-eyed delight with which Chaucer and Shakespeare followed all our English calendar, nor Marvell’s alert gaze, that could

‘Through the hazels thick espy
The hatching thristle’s shining eye;’

nor Tennyson’s, that could note

‘The curled white of the coming wave
Glassed in the slippery sand before it breaks.’

Between bird and bird, or flower and flower, Mr. Hosken scarcely discriminates. His garden is stocked after the old approved poetical fashion, with daisies, violets, roses and nightingales. It does not matter to

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him that the nightingale never sings, neither is seen, in that corner of England where he writes; nor does it occur to him to introduce into his landscape the beautiful and singular Cornish heath that grows in such profusion around his home. In short he is no hymner of natural phenomena, but employs the simplest only, and these merely as literary devices to give the colour of a human mood or thought, as—

‘How sweet the transient dream and reverie
Like twilight’s purple wing, sank on my heart.’

Or—

‘Panting for that great calm that hangs o’er heaven
Profound and vast as God, here am I thrown. . . .’

Or again in the song on page 35 that opens with a gush of pure melody that Shelley would not have disdained—

‘There’s a stillness in the stars,
And a sleep upon the earth,
And the day with all its jars
Is a dead jest, void of mirth.
And my heart is breaking, sweet,
With the memory of that hour,
When our happiness complete
Sprang and blossomed like a flower.’

For it is with man that he is mainly concerned; con-

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templating him at war with circumstance, and speculating upon the issues of the tangled game. I pointed out just now, that Mr. Hosken's poetical activity and his experience of London and its struggle for life developed together; and after learning how hard the struggle went with him, we need not wonder that his meditation runs at times too nearly to despair, as in the fine verses upon *Destiny* (pp. 28, 29). But to call him a despairing singer would be signally unjust. At the worst he shows a noble disappointment, but never ceases seeking for the clue of the tangle, for some Platonic Idea that shall afford the mind stable foothold amid the clashing currents of circumstance, and be discernible as a fixed mark of justice amid the flux of iniquitous phenomena. Upon this search the poet's imagination is despatched, like Noah's dove: and though it may come back with little news, the poet has the courage and humour to recognise that even in the act of searching there is recompence. At the close of the sonnet sequence '*Via Amoris*'—which I may here remark is in its main lines autobiographical—he finds his solace playfully in the exercise of his art:—

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‘ O holiday of fair creative power,
That sets the spirit on a wheel of joy ! . . . ’

while in the conclusion of that fine poem entitled ‘ Broken Sentences from a Blotting-Pad,’ we are met with the sterner comfort that all effort must be its own reward :—

‘ A moment do we rest, no more, and then
Some new desire awakes, and all is o’er—
Rest is decay, to labour is to grow—
All the high idols of the past are shrunk
Gleaming within their niches far away,
And we behold above our heads appear
Far other heights we never dreamed were there ;
For while we thought we climbed some mighty Alp,
We only scaled some puny eminence
That lay within the shadow at its base.’

I have probably said enough to show that while Mr. Hosken’s poetry is largely sensuous in form—and sensuousness remains the constant attribute of all good verse—its inspiration is in the main intellectual. It is meditative work. I am the more anxious to insist upon this, having remarked that upon the appearance of *Phaon and Sappho* one or two critics, observing that the poet had chosen a Shakespearian model, and detecting a very obvious looseness of dramatic grip in

INTRODUCTION

the tragedy, jumped to the conclusion that here was no more than a weak and belated imitator of Shakespeare. But in passing this judgment they lost sight of two important points. In the first place, *Phaon and Sappho* was the work of a young man, whose development too had been retarded by the circumstances of his education. A young man must have models while feeling his way to a style and method of his own: and this being granted, can he choose a better model than Shakespeare? 'But,' the critics will answer, 'Mr. Hosken gave little evidence of dramatic power.' This brings me to the second point. Be it allowed that he has little dramatic power, and that (since the poem professed to be a tragedy) dramatic power was what you reasonably looked for. But an alert critic, considering the work of a beginner, will have an eye for the bye-strokes as well as the main ones: and if the author, while missing with the main, prove effective with the bye—if Mr. Hosken, while failing to construct a satisfactory drama, gave evidence of strength in many fine meditative passages—then at the worst he stands convicted of a youthful error in choosing a literary form unsuited to convey his thought. In my

INTRODUCTION

humble opinion, Mr. Hosken is sufficiently vindicated by this little volume. Say what we will, our interest in the Shakespearian drama has become largely antiquarian. In its day it combined with the presentation of a dramatic story much rhetoric, much lyric poetry, much philosophical exposition. We in the nineteenth century have specialised these different functions; we take our lyric poetry in handy volumes; we have relegated declamation to the platform and the pulpit, and philosophy to the arm-chair, and complain if a playwright obscures with any of these the 'acting properties' of his play. We are too familiar with Shakespeare to find him out of fashion as a dramatist, and too reverent to complain if we did: let a modern author, however, revert to the Elizabethan model, and at once we feel the anachronism and begin to talk about Wardour Street.

But while the drama has restricted its scope, that of the sonnet has remained, and will remain, unchanged, and for this reason the sonnets in the present volume—though Shakespeare be still the inspiration, and though their diction lie even closer to Shakespeare's—have none of that belated air which offended in *Phaon and*

INTRODUCTION

Sappho. If an imitator, he is certainly no weak one who could write the two sonnets on 'Old-World Dreams' (pp. 13, 14) with the rhythmically dexterous opening—

‘Would this unquenchèd spirit now could take
One sip of that immortal beverage,
Wherewith th’ Olympians were wont to slake
Their divine thirst in a long-buried age ;
That I might feel mortality fall away
With the harsh noises of this feverish earth ! . . .’

or pen this exquisite conceit upon his mistress—

‘Thou art a geni
Set on the wrinkled forehead of wide death,
Whose glad diffusive splendour must condemn
All thought that undervalues human breath’ ;

or catch Shakespeare’s very note in such lines as—

‘O that this calculating soul would cease
To forecast accidents, time’s limping errors,
And take the present with the present’s peace,
Instead of filling life’s poor day with terrors ! . . .’

But indeed all talk of imitation here is a mistake. For the poet is plainly thinking for himself, not only when quite obviously original, but even when hammering out a reflection already obvious to men of wide reading who have all the world’s literature to start upon.

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Still, we who admire Mr. Hosken desire to lay little stress on the 'Postman-poet' plea. We desire his work to be brought to the final test of all poetry, and judged on its own merits. It is doubtful (to say the least) if a poet is the better for being also a postman; for though light walking exercise may agreeably titillate the brain, the double-knock and delivery of letters must certainly distract it. But in estimating a young writer, one of our first questions should be, What is his capacity for growth? And it is important to the answer to know what were his beginnings and what his obstacles. The reader may have further assurance that Mr. Hosken is a growing poet by turning to the poems 'The Doubt' and 'O should we meet again' in this volume—two of his earliest productions—and comparing their thin facility with the deep and considered music of 'Robin Hood,' his latest lyric, written but a week or two ago:—

'I read 'A lytell geste of Robyn Hode'
Within an ancient forest far withdrawn :—
The story rapt me in a wondrous mood
And I outread the dawn.
There was a trembling light upon the page,
The meeting of the morning and the day—

INTRODUCTION

The dewdrop shook not on the silent spray,
The world forgot its age—
The silent golden world, that morn in May.

I looked and saw a merry company
Down the green avenue with laugh and song,
And little joyful noises come along ;
Then died the tyranny
Of this grey world in me, with hoary wrong.

There saw I :—Robin with his fearless brow
And eye of frolic love ; Maid Marian ;
The moon-faced Tuck ; and, sporting 'neath a bough,
John, Robin's master man.
Scarlet, and Much, and all the outlaw clan,
With polished horn and bow, in Lincoln green,
Moved ceaselessly between the leafy screen.
A natural freedom ran
Through every spirit on that sylvan scene.

Anon I heard their horns begin to blow—
Then, in despite of age and time, arose
A woodland song that leaning on her bow
Maid Marian thus did close :
'O mad, mad world ! O happy life of ours !
Sing and be merry—evil is a thought
Which our own natural lives have brought to nought !
O happy, happy hours !
Who cares to fret and pine for what is not ? . . .

INTRODUCTION

I may be wrong, but when a man can handle language in this fashion, I am ready to salute him for a true poet.

A. T. QUILLER-COUCH.

May 20th, 1893.



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VIA AMORIS
A SONNET SEQUENCE

LIFE'S SECRET
A LIFE'S SECRET

I

I BEAR within the casket of my soul
The image of a far-off bygone love
Dwelling in loneliness, supreme above
Life's little tale of errors. The long toll
Of death's sad bell striking a sick man's ear
Bids not more melancholy thoughts to roll
Within the moving ocean of the mind,
Than when this memory stands distinct and clear
Before my sight, what time the Night hath lined
The concave universe with stars : I strive
To banish all the thoughts that It creates
With sterner meditations, but alive
Like to the Phoenix, still it emanates
From its own dust, and with my fancy mates.

3

VIA AMORIS

THE COMING OF LOVE

11

‘THERE’S not a power in stern philosophy
Sufficient to control this eating grief,
No mortal circumstance can bring relief—’
This was my constant cry—‘Ah wretched me !
Beyond the passing hour I nothing see,
But the dead flower, sour fruit, and blasted leaf,
And all the haggard shapes of misery,
With haunting care, life’s ever-present thief.’
Thus as I sorrowed—’twas the year’s fresh prime—
I saw a form born of the heaven and earth,
Clad in unparalleled grace, defying time
With her rich loveliness, that made a dearth
Of beauty in the world : Love rang his chime,
And youth came back to me with hope and mirth.

VIA AMORIS

A MEMORY OF LOVE

111

How sweet the transient dream and reverie,
Like twilight's purple wing, sank on my heart
In that fair season when I sat by Thee,
List'ning thy song that shamed Apollo's art!
Love breathes upon my memory, and I see
The scene within my mind lost in time past,
The ceaseless sun descending in the sea,
The huge dark waves against the boulders cast,
The solitude of nature, if such be,
The momentary lull, broke by the roar
Of billows, or the sea-birds' noisy glee
Around the time-sapped crags and gullies hoar ;
While thou wert by me : still in these I find
A shadow of thy presence left behind.

VIA AMORIS

THE CONFESSION

IV

WHEN I did make confession of my love,
That kiss of thine did steal my doubts away ;
The hypocrite thou couldst no longer prove—
'I love thee—peace,' that kiss of thine did say.
I felt thy lips ; no longer did I dream
The consummation of my heart's one prayer :
In my great darkness, lo ! a sudden gleam !
My spirit sought my eyes, and nestled there ;
And looking into them was that the cause
That thou didst kiss them, ere my love could speak ?
Say in that eloquent, yet silent pause
Didst thou discern it ere my words could break
The brooding summer's air ?—my life ! what gladness
Free'd all my being, overjoyed to madness !

VIA AMORIS

COUNSEL

V

O THAT this calculating soul would cease
To forecast accidents, time's limping errors,
And take the present with the present's peace,
Instead of filling life's poor day with terrors !
We would forestall the wisdom of the skies
By possibilities and half-drawn plans,
And flounder on where we should nimbly rise,
And in despair sit down with folded hands.
There is no certainty in happiness,
Nor does a sorrow live throughout our life;
We shew our wisdom when we onward press,
For still th' anticipation of the strife
Is than the strife more dreadful, and has been :
The shades of fears far off are soonest seen.

VIA AMORIS

TO A LADY

VI

ONE hour of passion carries to the grave
A world of resolution and high hope :
Why should I be the bent subduèd slave
Of such a hopeless love ?—with Time why cope
To break the wing of Fortune adverse ever ?
Why seek to make immortal in a line
The excellence of beauty ?—I shall never
Possess Thee, Idol as thou art of mine.
So the capricious tenor of our lives
Is hung on little chances, paltry things :
The deeper our clear speculation dives
The falser are our fine imaginings.
My abstract thought is tinted by affection,
And truth is but Thy beauty's fine reflection.

VIA AMORIS

A LOVER'S MEDITATION ON HIS LADY

VII

THE lonely thoughts that issue from my mind,
Fill this small room with shadows of the world,
Where the unstable state of all mankind
Before reflection's eye is strangely hurled.

O foolish man ! to reckon on a joy—

Thy trust is founded in uncertainty,

Our hopes do make us fools, a cherished toy

Show us but children still—and but for Thee

This life were valueless. Thou art a gem

Set on the wrinkled forehead of wide death,

Whose glad diffusive splendour must condemn

All thought that undervalues human breath.

Indebted unto fortune least of all,

Yethaving Thee, still rich, though fortunes thrall.

VIA AMORIS

A LOVER'S FANCIES

VIII

LOOKING within thine eyes what do I read ?
A world of thought in dreaming beauty hushed.
Say on what musings doth thy spirit feed,
Making divine those charms by fancy flushed ?
Dost thou anticipate that glorious time
When every cloud of darkness shall have fled,
And the hoar world revives her fabled prime
Ere for her offspring's misery she bled ?
In vain do I conjecture. Who can tell
What hopes or dreams now occupy thy soul ?
They soar beyond the stroke of Time's harsh bell,
And mounted on desire towards heaven roll :
Still turn to me those eyes of wondrous light,
And with their beauty greet my anxious sight.

VIA AMORIS

THE PEACE OF LOVE

IX

O Love, how full of comfort is thy soul !
How full of hope the prospect of thine eye !
Thy prophecy doth time, and chance control :
Beneath thy shadow I securely lie
Safe anchored to an everlasting peace,
O'er which our changeful fortunes have no power.
Mutation and decay their havoc cease
To dream away the uneventful hour,
Beauty wears hues it never wore before,
Young joy, no longer spurns this dusty earth,
And rapture on the heart's deserted shore
Rolls its succeeding waves.—There is a dearth
In Sorrow's shrunken realm of sighs and tears,
For Love's high-thoughted mind surmounts man's
fears.

VIA AMORIS

THE AFTERLIGHT

X

As a sick man within a half dark room,
When he extinguishes the taper's light
Feels his clear vision plunged in thickest night,
Till he, inurèd to the sudden gloom,
With the quick aid of fancy 'gins to see
Shapes indistinct at first, until his sight,
Familiar grown with shadows, breaketh free
From darkness' cloud.—E'en so it is with me
When thou dost hide from me thy beauteous face,
And I am forced in sorrow to depart.
Anon, the memory of the hour and place
To our last meeting consecrate—the art
Wherewith you made me music—and your looks,
Flash on me like a dream from Poet's books.

VIA AMORIS

OLD WORLD DREAMS

XI

WOULD this unquenchèd spirit now could take
One sip of that immortal beverage,
Wherewith th' Olympians were wont to slake
Their divine thirst in a long-buried age ;
That I might feel mortality fall away
With the harsh noises of this feverish earth,
While the soft cadence of some easeful lay—
Filling all things—should hail my second birth :
Silence scarce breathing in its sleep should veil
All memories of the past ; while ample plains,
Seas tipped with smiles of heaven, and woods, reveal
Rare forms of beauty, and the old remains
Of Grecian life before the years declined,
Beneath the noiseless pinion of the mind.

VIA AMORIS

OLD WORLD DREAMS

XII

O! to be now a creature of delight,
Following some piping swain along the vales
As day withdraws from heaven before the night,
List'ning the fluttering of the nightingales,
Pausing ere they commence their ravishing hymn
To the uprising orb, or to lie prone
Upon some height, and mark the foamy rim
Of the Egean lap the Persian's throne,
While seen afar, like unpolluted joys,
Fair dancers trip it to some perfect lyre,
And agèd priests, and troops of singing boys
Lead forth the flower-crowned victim to the fire,
Or after, list an Iliad's strains upsteal
Sung by some Homer, for his evening meal.

VIA AMORIS

THE BROAD WAY

XIII

TORMENTED by ourselves, and time, and earth,
We spaniel-like cling closer to our life,
And court the scourges from our very birth,
Till custom makes us love the noisy strife.
Nature and Heaven have on us set their seals,
Which we are ever trying to erase,
Content to follow Darkness' iron heels,
And fainting run a weary, useless race.
A little thing, the pricking of a thorn,
The blowing of an east wind, or a fall,
Send our souls of their pride and station shorn
To that great silence that receives us all :
Our higher part is nothing, let it go—
O ! thought for grief, and thus our stories flow.

VIA AMORIS

THE ORDER OF THE WORLD

XIV

My heart sinks when I look upon the world,
And see the wronger cased in evil might,
The bloody flag of hell at large unfurled,
While vice and misery clothe themselves in night ;
The cry of innocence, the growl of lust,
Fair claims despised, and unjust avarice,
Merit and honour trampled in the dust,
While sin and virtue are made casting dice,
Shook in the cup of custom, held by time,
With all humanity to watch the game.
Time was when all injustice, woe, and crime,
Were straight redressed by heroes of fair fame.
O that we had those old knights' chivalry,
The wronged to succour, and the slave to free !

VIA AMORIS

DAY DREAMS

xv

To musings high, and dreamings not of earth,
My mind is oftentimes tuned, where like a glass
Reflected shapes of mortal thought have birth,
Which make my sweet sad study as they pass.
In all the tragic pomp of wealth arrayed
The dead worlds of the past start into life,
Mocking at death, whose cold primeval shade
With constancy and beauty is at strife,
O foolish aspirations of the heart !
O wretched vanity to pant for fame !
What though I long to play each glorious part,
And to posterity transmit a name ?
I break your spells, and snap the stubborn chain ;
Yet lives your splendour in this slavish brain.

VIA AMORIS

THE PARTING

XVI

Thy secret to my too inquiring eye
Is painted in the pages of thy cheek ;
My counsel's comfort, ending with a sigh,
Show me but like thyself as fond and weak.
In vain my hope would struggle into speech,
And be a loving prophet, saying this—
'We meet again ere long.' I cannot teach
My heart to credit such a promised bliss.
And so I press thy hand, and kiss thy eyes
Washed by upwelling tears, and only feel
The future all a blank : I lose my prize
And gain a sorrow, comfort cannot heal.

We part in grief, silent as that vast fate
That rules all mortal lives in ancient state.

VIA AMORIS

ALONE

XVII

PANTING for that great calm that hangs o'er heaven
Profound and vast as God, here am I thrown,
Felled with th' rebounding stroke by sorrow given,
With all my gladness shrunken to a moan.
Erewhile my spirit like a well-tuned lyre
Sent forth delicious strains, beneath the hands
Of winged embodied thoughts, all love and fire,
In essence and in motion, spirit bands
That nursed the native joyfulness of life ;
But in the midst of my life's happy strain
Came an erratic spirit full of strife,
And laid his hand, all paralysed with pain,
On the sweet strings tremulous with my joy,
To fill the gentle hours with annoy.

VIA AMORIS

LOVE AND CIRCUMSTANCE

XVIII

O CIRCUMSTANCE ! what ruin thou hast made
In Love's fair world we ever may behold
By the imaginative, gentle aid
Of woful stories by old poets told ;
But this stern fact gives not philosophy
Sufficient to control the grieving heart,
From bearing thee a lover's enmity,
Because thou doom'st me from my love to part.
Ah ! when I think, a little while ago
I gazed into those eyes of love and light,
And lived as though time would not onward go,
But, standing still for aye, feed our delight,—
Despair so grips me at a pleasure o'er
That e'en my memory dares not backward soar.

VIA AMORIS

A MEDITATION

XIX

My life is but a study how to die.
Since there seems nought of worth in life on earth,
I'll school my spirit for eternity,
And study how from death to gain new birth.
I am in love with that which leads from hence
Because it points to all our minds desire,
When, rapt in contemplation, mortal sense,
And sin and error like a dream expire.
O heaven! the fountain-head of every grace,
Where wisdom, justice, beauty, power, and love
Have made their everlasting resting-place,
Teach now my better part to dwell above
The accidents, and follies of this breath
Misnamed our life, but rightly named our death.

VIA AMORIS

QUESTIONINGS

XX

BEREFT of everything but hopelessness,
Mark of an everlasting dumb Despair,
Must I yield up to hungry heaviness
The promise of a life so passing fair?
Is fortitude nought but a pinioned grief
Which cannot fly its stake, and therefore bears?
Was Hope created but to mock relief?
And are our joys quick jesters at our fears?
Can things within their opposites so lie?
Is this vast universe a howling waste
Around the terrors of humanity?
Why does the period of being haste
To the devouring jaws of hideous death?
And does the mighty mind depend on breath?

VIA AMORIS

THE INCONSTANCY OF THE MUSE

XXI

O WAYWARD Muse ! inconstant grown of late,
Why dost thou let thy watchful devotee
Hang up his foolish harp in idle state,
Above the stream of life on Care's sad tree ?
Like those renowned captives of old date,
Upon the exiled shore of my mind's sadness
I grieve imagination so elate
Is forced awhile to leave its sunny gladness.
O holiday of fair creative power,
That sets the spirit on a wheel of joy,
And with the olive binds each passing hour !
O come again, methinks thou art too coy !
With greater zest after so long a dearth,
I shall enjoy thy wise immortal mirth.



II
LYRICS

The lyf so short, the craft so long to lerne.

CHAUCER.

Visions of too lovely things

To endure the strain of time

Ere we give you shape and wings

Of harmonious thought, or rhyme,

Life so short is come and gone

While we dream.

Only touches of the dawn

Glint our theme.

SONG

SINK gently in the silent sea,
Die slowly, slowly in the west ;
Lulled by the winds sweet minstrelsy
To golden rest.

Thy wak'ning I shall view no more
Behind the east's pale shimmering hills ;
Ere thou arise the tale is o'er
Of earthly ills.

LYRICS

DESTINY

WHERE heaven, bright flashing through the deeps
Of this enduring universe,
Gleams brilliant with its massy steeps,
There sits a power to man averse,
Which ever hurls him to and fro,
Bound with its chains where'er he go.

'Tis Destiny, that through our life,
To tempt us, drops its golden ball.
When we are anxious in the strife
That should secure for us our all,
Comes Destiny to thwart our aim,
And leave us nothing but a name.

LYRICS

Fell power ! at war for aye with man,

Why hauntest thou his game of chance ?

Himself a strange imperfect plan,

His life a bauble. Cast thy glance

And shake thy awful brow again,

Thou canst not add another pain.

LYRICS

MAKE NO SWEET PROMISES

MAKE no sweet promises of truth :
Fanned by each breath of love is youth ;
Let thy sighs speak what words would tell,
In truth sweet girl they do it well :
Then let thy promise be a sigh,
Thy pledge a tear from that bright eye.

Hark ! 'tis the trumpets' brazen call,
The roll of drums from far does fall.
I hear the martial tread—farewell ;
Thy aspect speaks thy heart full well :
Then let thy promise be a sigh,
Thy pledge a tear from that bright eye.

LYRICS

SONG

I AM so desolate,—
Genius sighs—
Come, Love, and be my mate,
Give me thine eyes.

I am weary,
Love, give me rest ;
Leave me not dreary,
Give me thy breast.

The lark looks to heaven,
The flower to the sun ;
But my heart is sore riven
For thy beauty, sweet one.

LYRICS

Give me thy presence,
My life to enfold ;
Then care and sorrow hence,
That life shalt thou hold.

LYRICS

SONG

It is a solitary land,
Now thou art gone I feel it more,
My destiny is strangely planned :
Will sorrow haunt me evermore ?
The hanging woods, their solemn charms
Attract me not, the sobbing sea
Calls forth my woe, my empty arms
Are stretched for ever unto thee.

I sigh thy name unto the star
That lights the last decline of day ;
A mournful voice comes from afar,
'Thy Love hears not, he's far away.'

LYRICS

I tell the flowers about my Love,
I prattle of him to the streams,
My prayers ascend for him above,
My spirit flies to him in dreams.

The lonely sun's come forth and set
Upon this melancholy land,
And Hope puts in his tiny 'Yet'
E'en when Despair hath ta'en his stand.
The hanging woods, their solemn charms
Attract me not, the sobbing sea
Calls forth my woe, my empty arms
Are stretched for ever unto thee.

LYRICS

THERE'S A STILLNESS IN THE STARS

THERE'S a stillness in the stars,
And a sleep upon the earth,
And the day with all its jars
Is a dead jest, void of mirth.
And my heart is breaking, Sweet,
With the memory of that hour,
When our happiness complete
Sprang and blossomed like a flower.

Never shall we be the same,
Chance hath ordered otherwise ;
Hope with me is but a name
Thrilled with mem'ries of your eyes.

LYRICS

O that 'never,' when 'tis spoken,
Lays the trusting spirit prone
With its dreams and glories broken,
Like a ruined arch alone !

How this silence all around me
Weighs upon the wearied heart,
All the gentle bonds that bound me
Snap and wake me with a start ;
Not an answer to my sorrow
Doth thy presence Nature give,
And awakening with the morrow
I shall know 'tis death to live.

LYRICS

HYMN TO MUSIC

THOU who dost dwell, and art a living passion
In nature's soul—Music—I sing of thee.
O how can thought of man or language fashion
Unto the mind the might of harmony !
The very hope is blissful vanity ;
Yet, by the power of fancy hurled along,
My spirit with compelling melody
Beats rapturously ! far off ! I catch the song
Of spirits, lost the shimmering heights of heaven among.

On golden clouds and rainbows bright, descending
Far through the many-coloured universe,
Fair trains of spirits beautiful are wending
Their rosy way to harmony and verse ;

LYRICS

Their very presence steals away the curse
Which lies on nature—these are they who hold
Each sun and star in their appointed course.
The dream of sage Pythagoras behold :
Lo ! music's golden wing the universe enfold.

See ! on a throne of brightness as the sun,
Great Homer strikes his high immortal lyre,
And as the master's fingers lightly run
Along the ranges of the sounding wire,
See ! Pindar kindle with the mystic fire
Of inspiration as he bends below.
The strings are struck, and higher, higher, higher !
The perfect notes swell rapid now, now slow,
And anon scarcely heard so distant, sweet, and low.

But what is yon fair spirit crowned with stars
Around whose feet a thousand others play ?
Lo ! there are trumpets sounding to the wars,
The tragic song of woe, the lovely lay,

LYRICS

Love's many-tonèd harp—the sad, the gay,
The various music of humanity,
All these are there, lit by the glorious ray
Of genius, and the sea of harmony
Rolls perfect in its sound, resistless, vast, and free.

This is th' Hellenic mind, the embodiment
Of intellect and genius. View her well ;
Upon her robe there is no seam or rent,
But all is perfect—say what tongue can tell
Her glory ?—hers without a parallel !
The civiliser of a thousand worlds
Springing to life in time—renown doth fill
His trumpet with her name, while peace unfurls
Her banner, and despair to the 'past's darkness hurls

This is the greatest legacy of time,
A harvest in itself—and yet a seed
Of that within the future, when sublime
Man shall arise from guilt and error freed—

LYRICS

Nay, smile not at the hope !—it is decreed :
We dream not of the summits that man's mind
Will yet attain—what visions bright succeed
Each other as the changing strains unwind :
All thought ! all life ! all joy ! are by their Power
confined.

LYRICS

SONG

Now silent hangs the universe,
And night enthroned amid the heaven
Is from her fount of glory pouring
Her bright accumulated fires ;
And as the golden lights disperse
Which faintly bloom upon the even,
While now no more the tempest 's louting,
Lay on my breast thy head which tires,
And I will sing thee, weary love, asleep,
And, while thou gently slumber'st, watch will keep.

LYRICS

SONG

At last in death I find thee,
And I am left below ;
No mortal power could bind thee
To this dark land of woe :
In vain my teardrops flow
For thee, dead Imogene.

O thou art gone for ever,
In vain thy loss I grieve,
And in my bosom never
Can aught such loss retrieve,
Or joy its gloom relieve,
My pale, cold Imogene !

LYRICS

On some far steep of heaven,
Say, dost thou watch from there ?
Or is it to thee given
To bear aloft my prayer,
And soothe my heart's despair,
Departed Imogene ?

LYRICS

THE VIOLET

I GET my hue from heaven's own blue,
A beautiful spirit I hold,
A fairy bright, that through the night
Close to my heart I fold.
None heareth the strain, that once and again
Through the night he singeth to me ;
And when he would sleep, I watch o'er him keep,
And muse on his melody :
All things of the night in his song take delight,
And I perfume his chamber each hour ;
The lizard and owl, and each wakeful fowl,
Through night's silent halls seek my bower.
The stars ask me oft where my love I have lain,
And the glow-worm entranced comes to listen his strain ;
His song you may hear, but his beauty's my own ;
No eye but mine sees him, so lovely, so lone.

LYRICS

THERE WAS A POWER IN THEE

THERE was a power in thee, that from my soul
Drew forth strange energies ;
There was new music in the thunder's roll
And in the rising seas.

All nature was suffused with a new glory
Before my raptured eye ;
My life was made one sweet enchanted story
Thrilled through with ecstasy.

We had one will, one life, one fate, one aim,
One spirit in us dwelt ;
Our very features seemed to grow the same,
Beneath one heaven we knelt.

LYRICS

Love was our tutor, and, like some sweet flower,
 Beneath its suns and rains
Our life grew full of loveliness and power,
 Sweet hopes and gentlest pains.

Sweet musings, high imaginations streamed
 Our spirits to unbind ;
It seemed as though heaven ope'd and down-
 ward gleamed
 Rays from the Eternal Mind.

All was so wild, so fair, so wonderful,
 The sounds and scenes of dreams,
Or some low strain of music, rich and full,
 That on the spirit streams.

Love made the world a smiling Faerie land,
 There was no crime, no woe ;
Gold had no power, there was no bloodstained brand,
 No tear was seen to flow.

LYRICS

All Nature knew an universal rest,

The world had wedded love,

No longer, so we deemed, was man distressed,

Heaven was no more above.

LYRICS

THE DOUBT

A youth beside a maiden strayed
Within the woodland's changing shade.
'I love her!' cried the eager boy;
The maiden's bosom felt no joy
At this confession.—Loves her?—who?
He loves another? is it true?
They were companions free to rove,
But never had they spoke of love;
And fancy heard
Each building bird
Sing, O he loves another!

The lovely maiden's cheek turns pale
Before the raptured lover's tale,
She marks what he confides to her,
She looks on him, the worshipper

LYRICS

Of some strange beauty, who perchance
Hath won him by a word or glance,
And all the maiden's hopes fall dead,
As on her bosom droops her head,
While fancy heard
Each building bird
Sing, O he loves another!

Love triumphed o'er the time and place,
The maiden with averted face
Stooped for a violet on the ground,
While tears her secret sorrow found.
'Pardon this trial,' cried the youth—
'It is yourself I love in truth,
'I did this but to prove your love,
'Henceforth as friends no more we rove.'

The maiden heard
Each building bird
Sing, me! he loves none other.

LYRICS

O SHOULD WE MEET AGAIN!

THOUGH years have fled unheeded by,
And hearts and hopes have changed,
Yet oh! how oft sweet memory's eye
Across the past hath ranged,
While hope's young voice in music broke
Repeating one loved strain,
And thus it ran as love awoke—
O should we meet again!
O should we meet again, dear heart,
O should we meet again,
No power in time should make us part
If we should meet again!

LYRICS

What though we deem affection dead,
And smile away the past,
And shake at youth our wiser head
And say it cannot last ;
Yet even then we touch a chord,
Which proves our lesson vain,
The wish escapes us in the word,
O should we meet again !
O should we meet again, dear heart,
O should we meet again,
No power in time should make us part,
If we should meet again.

Time takes more wisdom than it gives,
More truth than it imparts,
When sad experience only lives
To mock the simpler hearts.
Pack age and time and sorrow hence,
Which wrongly judge of gain,

LYRICS

Come, hope, imbue each longing sense

Until we meet again !

Until we meet again, dear heart,

Until we meet again,

No power in time shall make us part

When we do meet again.

LYRICS

LOVE AND EARTH'S ECHOES

FIRST LOVER

Love that is spoken often dies,
Quick as the light in evening skies,
Or as a song upon the ear,
And leaves no answering spirit near :
Wilt thou be true ? Shall I ne'er rue
My plighted faith ? Wilt thou be true ?

ECHO

Wilt thou be true ?

SECOND LOVER

That doubt, O maiden, do not name !
Changeless as yon eternal flame
My spirit evermore shall be
In its full worshipping of thee.

LYRICS

I will be true ! Thou shalt not rue
Thy plighted faith ! I will be true

ECHO

I will be true.

FIRST LOVER

O Love, I mourned thy broken faith,
And now I live to mourn thy death,
And, like the echo ringing clear,
Thy voice was false within my ear !
'I will be true.' O ! echo earth,
Are these things only for your mirth ?

ECHO

Only for—mirth.

LYRICS

ROBIN HOOD

I READ 'A lytell geste of Robyn Hode'

Within an ancient forest far withdrawn :—

The story rapt me in a wondrous mood,

And I outread the dawn.

There was a trembling light upon the page,

The meeting of the morning and the day—

The dewdrop shook not on the silent spray,

The world forgot its age—

The silent golden world, that morn in May.

The fever and the dust of this worn time

Passed like a dream from me, and left me free,

Musing on that antique dramatic rime

Beneath an old-world tree.

LYRICS

I looked and saw a merry company
Down a green avenue with laugh and song,
And little joyful noises come along ;
Then died the tyranny
Of this grey world in me, with heary wrong.

There saw I :—Robin with his fearless brow
And eye of frolic love ; Maid Marian ;
The moon-faced Tuck ; and, sporting 'neath a
bough,

John, Robin's master man.

Scarlet, and Much, and all the outlaw clan,
With polished horn and bow, in Lincoln green,
Moved ceaselessly between the leafy screen.

A natural freedom ran
Through every spirit on that sylvan scene.

Anon I heard their horns begin to blow—
Then, in despite of age and time, arose

LYRICS

A woodland song that, leaning on her bow,

Maid Marian thus did close.

‘O mad, mad world ! O happy life of ours !

Sing and be merry—evil is a thought

Which our own natural lives have brought to
nought !

O happy, happy hours !

Who cares to fret and pine for what is not ?’

The music still was murmuring in my brain

When I awoke from that sweet reverie,

List’ning to catch once more that unreal strain.—

Lo ! how such pageants flee.

Idle and silent stood the forest walks—

Gone was that merry company—nought there,

Save the bird’s song, broke on the tranquil air ;

Such as from those grey stocks,

Long generations back, rose everywhere.

III

BROKEN SENTENCES FROM A
BLOTTING-PAD

BROKEN SENTENCES FROM A
BLOTTING-PAD

First Series

THE LOVER'S LETTER

I

It chanced while being in that idle mood
When every vagrant object from without,
Through the dim windows which our senses make,
Hath liberty to cast upon the mind
Its shadow, as it passes and is lost,
That I sate toying with a blotting-pad,
And with a thousand thoughts fantastical
Watched the innumerable glancing waves
Upspringing, 'neath the touches of the sun,

BROKEN SENTENCES

Whose fingers swept the playful ocean crests,
And forming in the region of the clouds
A lovely continent of fairy lands,
Of seas immeasurable and rippling bays,—
Where solitude for ever pined away—
Of guarded passes on tempestuous hills,
Where beauty walked secure, and dragon eyes
That from their caverned eminences swept
The silent region of the golden plains ;
With other antique tricks, and shapes of thought
Which the creating mind will form, then throw
As lightly from it as a truant boy
Shakes his imprisoned bubble free on air.
Then turning lightly to that blotting-pad,
Held gently poised between the finger-tips,
I thought of the impressions it had ta'en,
And of the various thrills of joy and pain,
Thought and emotion, it held record of
Within its blurred and ruined characters,

FROM A BLOTTING-PAD

And how the rare confusion of its lines
Was an epitome of this wild world
With interwoven lines of thought and life.
Soon my attention grew less general,
For I began to read the characters
Which some young lover's ink had left thereon,
Though fragmentary and confused they lay
Even as the passion that created them,
And these the broken sentences I saved.

II

'It seems that years' ;—O heart that panteth here,
In these four words, for what hath passed away !
What visions hath the fancy leave to paint
While musing on the passion of these words !
What undertones of time and love are here,
What comment on the briefness of our joys,
Set starlike 'mid this life's monotony !
What dream-brief hope—what glory in young eyes !

BROKEN SENTENCES

What love-tinged lips budding towards a kiss !
We are not as we were—the world hath ta'en
The more ethereal part of us away,
And with the iron pen of circumstance
Hath writ its callous prudence on our lives,
And therefore when we call up once again
The beauty of our younger state and love,
The contrast strikes such shame into our souls
That we can only say—‘ It seems that years ! ’

III

‘ Ah ! that you could but know this heart of mine ’ ;—
I see the picture of a yearning soul
Trembling towards its mate in these few words,
An innocence as pure as God’s own thought
Forming the life within some infant frame,
What self-sufficiency and power is here
Championing the dragon evils of the world
In isolated strength ! ah me ! how far

FROM A BLOTTING-PAD

True love transcends the bounds of ignorance
As made and coined by speech, what weakness here,
What might in its unloosened utterance !
What straining of high feeling 'gainst the chains
Of our small knowledge—ending in a sigh !
And do these words imply there is a doubt
Thrown o'er the holy secret of one heart ?
O vows breathed underneath o'ershadowing trees !
O secrets only spoken by that tongue
That dwells within a mystic consciousness,
Wherefrom the silent soul of love puts forth
A seeking hand upon the world of things
To leave its impress. Time reveals even love,
And then how much of love is selfishness,
For the gross things of this material frame
Are only everlasting—holiest thoughts,
High promptings die ! a few winged years, and lo !
Are we so ready with that innocence
That we desire to show our sealèd hearts ?

BROKEN SENTENCES

Love may deceive itself, prove insecure
Against the odds of time, and the belief
In its own being be shattered in an hour.

IV

‘*This inner life*’ ;—Poor lover, what was that
Which you next wrote of?—nothing can be seen
But these three words ; before and after—blank—
For the ambitious, grasping characters
Of some gold son of Cain blots out the rest,
Leaving the tender form and spirit of love
Close jostled by the hard, dry signs of gain.
Of the sweet quiet of a lover’s mood,
That estimates its idol at a price
Above the mighty balances of time,
And shines amid the tempest of the world
A beacon to forlorn and wearied men,
Too happy, lover, wert thou dreaming then ?
Or had love kindled thy intelligence,

FROM A BLOTTING-PAD

And shown to thee the beauteous forms of thought
With Dante-fervour?—Didst thou then discern
Some heights scaled only by the godlike ones?
I question: thou being gone, who answers me?

v

'*Death*' ;—How that word stands out among the rest
Spared by the ink, as death is spared by all—
A skull and crossbones carved upon a ring
That decks the coral finger of a girl.—
What shuddering fear or hope didst draw from death?
What dread or consolation? let it pass
As silent as the silence that it gives:
Yet love, in its great innocence of speech,
Will play with death, even as a little child,
Unconscious of the venom it provokes,
Will touch the burnished skin of sleeping snake.
For was not love before the heaven and earth,
When wide chaotic death lay everywhere,
And can it well forget its ancient mate?

BROKEN SENTENCES

VI

'Heaven' ;—The last word we trace, and with this word
The crown of all illusions, do we close
The great illusion of our insect lives ;
But love awakes young hearts when we are dust.

FROM A BLOTTING-PAD

Second Series

THE POET'S LETTER

I

UPON the other side of that worn pad
My eye began to weed a poet's soul
Out of the scanty sentences I saved :—
The landmarks of some mood writ out at large
In an epistle to a trusted friend,
The bulk of which having perished, what remained
Showed like some mighty mind that threw its light
On some far period in the dawn of time.

II

' *Where shall I plant my foot* ' ;—Starting with doubt,
Or what is kin to doubt—perplexity :—
Ah ! little knows the garrulous world of men
What night envelops the creating mind,

BROKEN SENTENCES

When, with its sleepless energies at bay,
It tries to give a form unto those things
Its power hath conjured up ; while o'er the steeps
Of high forbidding thought a moon will flash,
And fling its inspiration and its light
Upon the jagged path, and then return
Behind the hungry darkness, while alone,
The sorely tried formative principle
Sinks back again upon chaotic thought,
Having missed the golden and supreme delight
Of full conception.—What a mood is this !
What godlike chafing ! what endeavour ! strength !
What throes, as of dim chaos giving birth
To the harmonious world ! Then breaks the light
After long years, perchance, and all is changed
To order from disorder, gathered up
Into the central and absorbing sun
Of his intelligence, the poet sees
The intuitions and the ends of things

FROM A BLOTTING-PAD

Whirled erewhile round the dark and empty vast,
Fall into rank and shape his universe.
All hath been said and sung, and it remains
For the aged mind to see monotony,
And cease from reproduction of the past.
Old Homer, thou art greatly what thou art,
Because thy fortune gave thee virgin soil
To raise thy harvest from, and none were by
Thy cunning to dispute.—Or is there here
A more heroic note of hope and strength,
A mind that sees within these latter times
Riches before undreamed of, that will stoop
Its crest to no name past, but with a look
That saith, ‘Some mightier spirits needs must be
‘To show the complex workings of this world
‘Than those who sang sweet stories to its youth,
‘And I am one of such?’—there is no aim,
Nor an ambition of such heavenly touch,
As that the poet feels—how weak such thoughts!

BROKEN SENTENCES

A handful of poor guesses at some hour
Known only to the mind o'er which it lay.

111

'Running a race 'gainst time with small results' ;—
This speaks of days of gloom, when the dulled mind
In apathy sinks back upon itself—
When Nature seems a blank, and stateliest verse
A work of idleness; through the dreamy wall
Wherewith the poet hems his life around,
The bleak reality of things will burst
Like a December gloom, and then faith goes
In any high heroic enterprise,—
Thought shows itself below the estimate
Of happier moments; yea, the mind itself,
Hurled from the wall of heaven which it would scale,
Lies numbed upon the earth. So poets wait
For the irregular hours they call divine,
And learn how frail their power compared with time.

72

FROM A BLOTTING-PAD

IV

'Anticipation' ;—So we pass the days
Within the echoing vales, with unstrung lyre
Laid by—in meditation, while we catch
Like flashing flights of spirits to and fro
Between the pauses of our joyful breath
Some vision of completion, that will play
At hide-and-seek around our rapturous mood,
Lulling the unproductive hours with sight
Of the great tracts beyond, which we are graced
To view, ere we pass through them ; all the life
Gathered within a moment, which the mind
Feels to be ample payment for its toils.

V

'Completion' ;—now to rest and cast the eye
Upon the road that led unto the stars,
And feel the value of the storms that shake
The regions where designing spirits dwell.—

BROKEN SENTENCES FROM A BLOTTING-PAD

A moment do we rest, no more, and then
Some new desire awakes and all is o'er—
Rest is decay, to labour is to grow—
All the high idols of the past are shrunk
Gleaming within their niches far away,
And we behold above our heads appear
Far other heights we never dreamed were there ;
For while we thought we climbed some mighty Alp,
We only scaled some puny eminence
That lay within the shadow at its base.

IV

EPISTLE TO A FRIEND IN THE DITCH



EPISTLE TO A FRIEND IN THE DITCH

I

Now some have sense and little cash,

And men with cash have one sense ;

They have the sense to keep their trash,

And think all else but nonsense.

Life is the running of a race

Along a slippery, muddy place,

Where some are helped with friends and grace

The prize to gain,

While others, with endeavouring pace,

Fall on the plain.

EPISTLE TO A FRIEND

II

Some mortals buy the joys of life,
Some beg its necessities,
Some wage with Fortune endless strife,
Some laugh at her vagaries.—
The Parson minds his tithes and souls,
The Lawyer thrives on sin and rolls,
The Doctor fills the sexton's holes
With murderous blunders ;
Great captains send men hence in shoals
'Mid warlike thunders.

III

We civilise the animal,
Yet elbow back the angel ;
Would not have man a cannibal,
But keep him in his range well—

IN THE DITCH

This century like lopsided boat,
Just keeps its wretched hulk afloat,
Its God, attired in best black coat,
 It worships daily.
Which God, hight Practical, doth dote
 On things going gaily.

IV

Dame Fortune like a churlish boor
 Helps those who have the wherewith ;
Luck oftener falls to those with store,
 The poor's success an air-myth.—
The undeserving get the tart,
While merit strains each nerve and art—
Though far behind even at the start—
 To reach the prize,
Knaves kick the dust when they 've the start
 In worthy eyes.

EPISTLE TO A FRIEND

v

Poor honesty is still a fool,
Crowned with a cap and painted,
While craft doth keep a thriving school
And virtue is attained,—
Hypocrisy's a strumpet jade,
Religion too a thriving trade,
Our creeds like clothes are ready made
To suit all sizes ;
Blind justice even loves parade,
The Law, disguises.

vi

What is the use of sad complaint ?
It brings no alteration ;
Life's goods are but the actor's paint
And life—a situation !—
Man is but man when all is told,
Whatever accidents controlled

IN THE DITCH

His birth ;—be 't poverty or gold

He ends the same—

A little dust, a little mould,

A vanished name.

VII

Then let us up and do our part

With manly resolution,

A ready hand, and manly heart

Will yield us life's solution.

Let's pledge each other in our cups,

And square our 'downs' against our 'ups'

E'en as we can,

And when misfortune with us saps,

Pass him the can.



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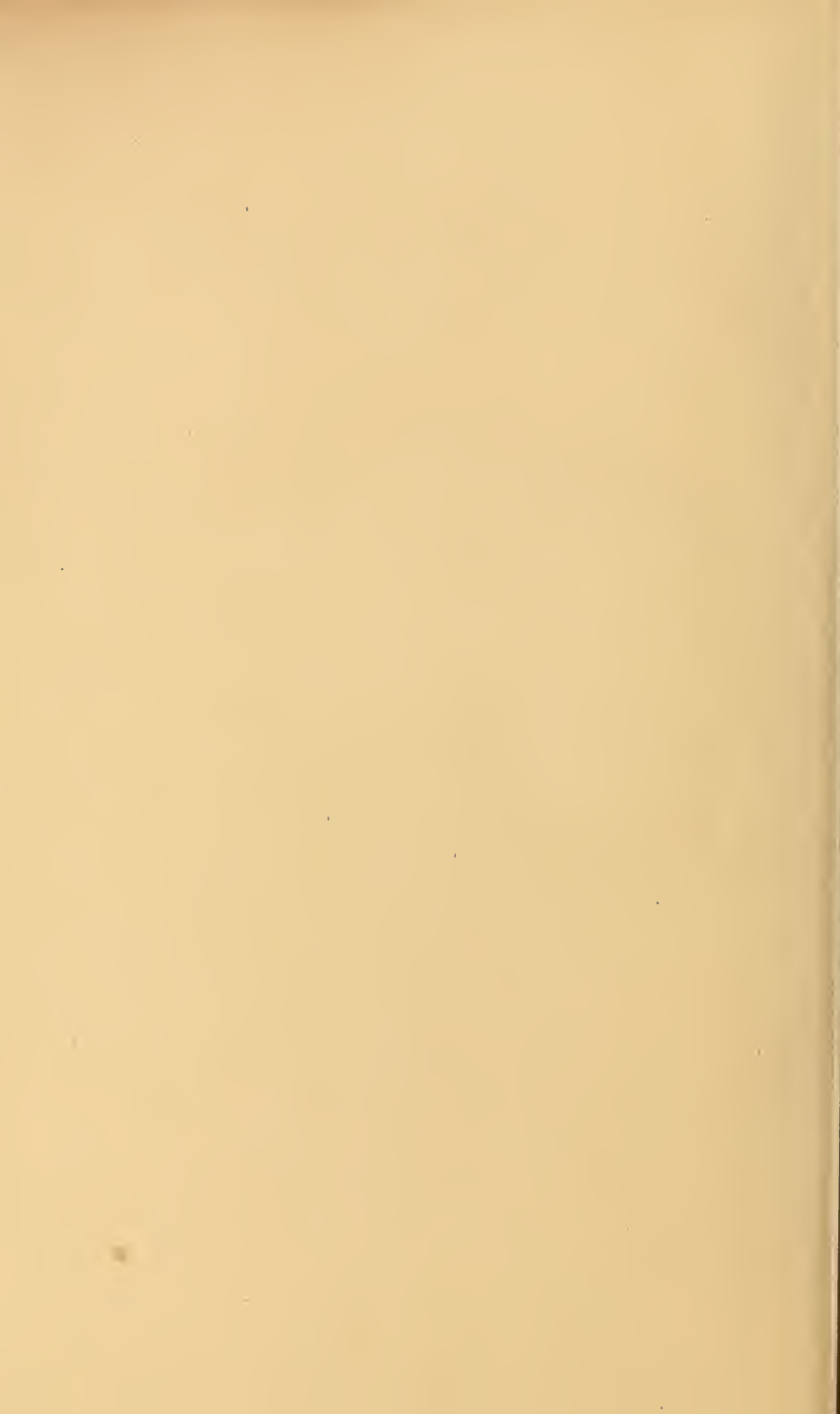
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